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A Nation of Immigrants

The U.S. population crossed 300 million in October, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. Immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia, drives much of this growth and promises to reshape the United States as a more diverse nation, one where the average age will increase more slowly than in most other industrialized nations.

Today, the United States accepts more legal immigrants as permanent residents than the rest of the world combined.

The Census Bureau Web site (www.census.gov) includes a "population clock" that shows the U.S. population as of November 1 was 300,113,977 with a net gain of one person every 11 seconds.

The foreign-born now comprise 12 percent of Americans. Together with their U.S.-born children, they account for more than half of U.S. population growth.

Asian-born residents comprise one-fourth of the nation's total foreign-born population. In 2005, the Indian American community became the second largest Asian community in the United States with a population of 2.3 million, and a growth rate of 38 percent, the highest for any Asian American community.

High birthrates among new immigrants promise continued growth and a younger, more diverse nation. The population of the United States is projected to increase to 400 million by 2043, even as developed nations in Asia and Europe experience declines in population. Today's median age of 36.5 years is expected to reach

39 by 2030 and then level off, a much smaller increase than projected for many other nations.

Brookings Institution demographer William H. Fry believes that both consequences of high immigration—growth and diversity—are beneficial. Even as other nations undergo "extreme aging for the most part," the United States will enjoy continued "growth and vitality," he said on a Council of Foreign Relations podcast.

Fry argues that greater racial and ethnic diversity is a "good strategy." It "gives us more connections to other countries. We're living in a global economy where the more ideas we get from other parts of the world, the more interaction we have.... The more that these people from other parts of the world are part of our labor force... helps us," he said.

—Michael Jay Friedman



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Above: Mexican immigrant Teresa Camino is one of 7,500 people sworn in as new American citizens on March 28, 2003, in Los Angeles. The largest number of foreign-born Americans are from Mexico.

Left: Karwinder Singh and Ranjit Kaur of India took the oath to become U.S. citizens on July 4, 2002, in Seattle, Washington.